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Aboriginal Languages and Selected Vitality Indicators in 2011

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.	not available for any reference period
..	not available for a specific reference period
...	not applicable
0	true zero or a value rounded to zero
0^s	value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded
^{p}	preliminary
^{r}	revised
x	suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
^{E}	use with caution
F	too unreliable to be published
*	significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

Note of appreciation

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Note

A similar article was prepared for the Proceedings of the 17th conference of the Foundation for endangered languages (FEL), which was based on two earlier papers published by Statistics Canada. The FEL XVII conference was held at Carleton University in Ottawa in October 2013. Minor changes and reformatting have been made from the published version in the Proceedings. The FEL XVII conference proceedings were available only in English. However, the current modified version is available in both English and French.

Abstract

Many of the 60 or so Aboriginal languages in Canada are considered endangered to varying degrees for their long-term survival. Assessing language vitality or endangerment through the measurement of various factors can provide useful information to help ensure the continuity of a language. This paper illustrates how the 2011 Census of Population and the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) can be used to measure some of the factors that provide information related to the vitality of Aboriginal languages. For example, 213,490 people reported an Aboriginal mother tongue in the 2011 Census of Population. The Cree languages, Inuktitut and Ojibway were the most frequently reported Aboriginal languages. However, many Aboriginal languages were reported as mother tongue by less than 500 people. According to the 2011 NHS, about one in six Aboriginal people can conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language. Additionally, more than 52,000 Aboriginal people were able to converse in an Aboriginal language that was different from their mother tongue, suggesting that these individuals acquired an Aboriginal language as a second language. More in-depth analysis on the vitality of Aboriginal languages can be done using these two data sources as well as the 2012 Aboriginal Peoples Survey.

Introduction

Over 60 Aboriginal languages are spoken in Canada today. However, many of them are considered endangered to varying degrees for their long-term survival (Lewis et al., 2013; UNESCO, 2010; Norris, 1998).

Aboriginal languages are of great importance to the identity of many First Nations people, Inuit and Métis (Canadian Heritage, 2005). Moreover, the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) found that the revitalization of Aboriginal languages is central to the overall health of individuals and communities (RCAP, 1996).

Assessing language vitality or endangerment can provide useful information that can help ensure the survival of a language. A number of indicators have been proposed and used to measure language vitality. For example, UNESCO (2003) and Ethnologue: Languages of the World (Lewis et al., 2013) identify a number of factors to assess language vitality and endangerment. Examples of these factors include: intergenerational language transmission, absolute number of speakers, the stability of and trends in the population size, age range of the speakers, proportion of speakers within the total population, shifts in domains of language uses, community members' attitudes toward their own language, residency and migration patterns of speakers, and information about the use of second languages.

More specific to Aboriginal languages in Canada, Norris (1998; 2007) examined a number of factors that differentiate viable languages from endangered ones, such as: size of the population with an Aboriginal mother tongue, index of continuity, index of ability or second language acquisition, average age of the population with knowledge of an Aboriginal language and of the population with an Aboriginal mother tongue or home language, and place of residence.

Language vitality should not be assessed using a single factor alone and it is therefore recommended to use a variety of factors together to evaluate a language's situation (UNESCO, 2003).

Based on previously released findings,[1] this paper illustrates how the 2011 Census of Population and the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) can be used to measure some of these factors to provide information related to the vitality of Aboriginal languages in Canada. Only a few selected factors, such as the size of the mother tongue population for various Aboriginal languages and the proportion of Aboriginal people who reported being able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language, are presented in this paper. Other vitality factors could also be measured using these two data sources in future research.

Historical comparisons are useful in understanding how various Aboriginal languages have changed over time in terms of population size and composition. A few comparisons with the 2006 Census of Population are provided in this paper, but comparisons over a time period are for the most part beyond the scope of this paper since they would require a more detailed analysis accounting for a number of complex factors.

Selected findings from the 2011 Census of Population[2]

Over 60 Aboriginal languages reported in 2011

The 2011 Census of Population recorded over 60 Aboriginal languages grouped into 12 distinct language families – an indication of the diversity of Aboriginal languages in Canada.

According to the 2011 Census, 213,490 people reported an Aboriginal mother tongue and 213,350 people reported speaking an Aboriginal language most often (132,920) or regularly (80,430) at home.[3,4]

Cree languages, Inuktitut and Ojibway are the most frequently reported Aboriginal languages

Despite the diversity of Aboriginal languages in Canada, three of them (the Cree languages, Inuktitut and Ojibway) accounted for almost two-thirds of the population having an Aboriginal language as mother tongue. The ten most often reported Aboriginal languages accounted for almost 90% of the population having an Aboriginal mother tongue.

The range in the mother tongue population size varies among Aboriginal languages (Table 1). The Cree languages were by far the most frequently reported Aboriginal mother tongue, with more than 83,000 people who responded that one of the Cree languages was their mother tongue in 2011. Inuktitut (34,110) and Ojibway (19,275) were the second and third Aboriginal languages with the largest populations.

Dene (11,860), Innu/Montagnais (10,965) and Oji-Cree (10,180) were other Aboriginal languages with a mother tongue population size of 10,000 or more.

In 2011, at least 25 Aboriginal languages were reported as mother tongue by less than 500 people. The absolute number of speakers is one of the factors outlined by UNESCO to assess language vitality, but it is difficult to determine a specific threshold (UNESCO, 2003). However, languages with a greater number of speakers are more likely to survive in the long-term than languages with a small population base (Norris, 1998).

1. This paper is based on two earlier pieces of work: Statistics Canada, 2012; Statistics Canada, 2013.
2. This section is based on the document entitled *Aboriginal languages in Canada*, which presents information on Aboriginal mother tongues and home languages for the total population (excluding institutional residents) based on the data from the 2011 Census of Population. Mother tongue and home language data are also available in the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) but they are presented for a different universe (population in private households) and are therefore not directly comparable to the 2011 Census data.
3. Mother tongue refers to the first language learned at home in childhood and still understood. Home language refers to the language spoken most often or on a regular basis (in addition to the language spoken most often) at home. Counts for mother tongue and home language in this document include single response of an Aboriginal language as well as multiple responses of an Aboriginal language with English and/or French.
4. In 2011, there were a total of 31 Indian reserves and Indian settlements that were 'incompletely enumerated.' For these reserves or settlements, enumeration was either not permitted or was interrupted before it could be completed, or enumeration was not possible because of natural events (specifically forest fires in Northern Ontario). Data for these 31 Indian reserves and Indian settlements are not included in the 2011 Census tabulations. As a result, counts for certain Aboriginal languages may be underestimated.

Table 1
Population with an Aboriginal mother tongue for the ten most reported Aboriginal languages as mother tongues and grouping of Aboriginal languages by mother tongue population size range, Canada, 2011

Ten most reported Aboriginal languages as mother tongue	Population
1. Cree languages[1]	83,475
2. Inuktitut	34,110
3. Ojibway	19,275
4. Dene	11,860
5. Innu/Montagnais	10,965
6. Oji-Cree	10,180
7. Mi'kmaq	8,030
8. Atikamekw	5,915
9. Blackfoot	3,250
10. Stoney	3,155

Grouping of Aboriginal languages by mother tongue population size range

Aboriginal languages with a mother tongue population size between 1,000 and less than 3,000
Tlicho (Dogrib); Algonquin; Slavey, n.o.s.; Carrier; Dakota

Aboriginal languages with a mother tongue population size between 500 and less than 1,000
Chilcotin, Gitksan, Shuswap (Secwepemctsin), Michif, Inuvialuktun, Naskapi, Nisga'a, Halkomelem, Mohawk and South Slavey

Aboriginal languages with a mother tongue population size with less than 500[2]
Kwakiutl (Kwak'wala), Malecite, Thompson (Ntlakapamux), Inuinnaqtun, Gwich'in, Beaver, Okanagan, Nootka (Nuu-chah-nulth), Lillooet, Kaska (Nahani), Tsimshian, Cayuga, North Slavey (Hare), Northern Tutchone, Oneida, Straits, Sarcee, Haisla, Southern Tutchone, Wetsuweten, Tahltan, Tlingit, Kutenai, Heiltsuk, Haida, Sekani, Squamish and Tutchone, n.o.s.

1. Cree languages include the following categories: Cree not otherwise specified (which refers to those who reported 'Cree'), Swampy Cree, Plains Cree, Woods Cree, and a category labelled 'Cree not included elsewhere' (which includes Moose Cree, Northern East Cree and Southern East Cree).
2. There are more Aboriginal languages than what is listed in Table 1, but a number of Aboriginal languages were grouped together for dissemination purpose as a result of a low count of respondents reporting these languages.

Note: n.o.s. means 'not otherwise specified.'
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2011.

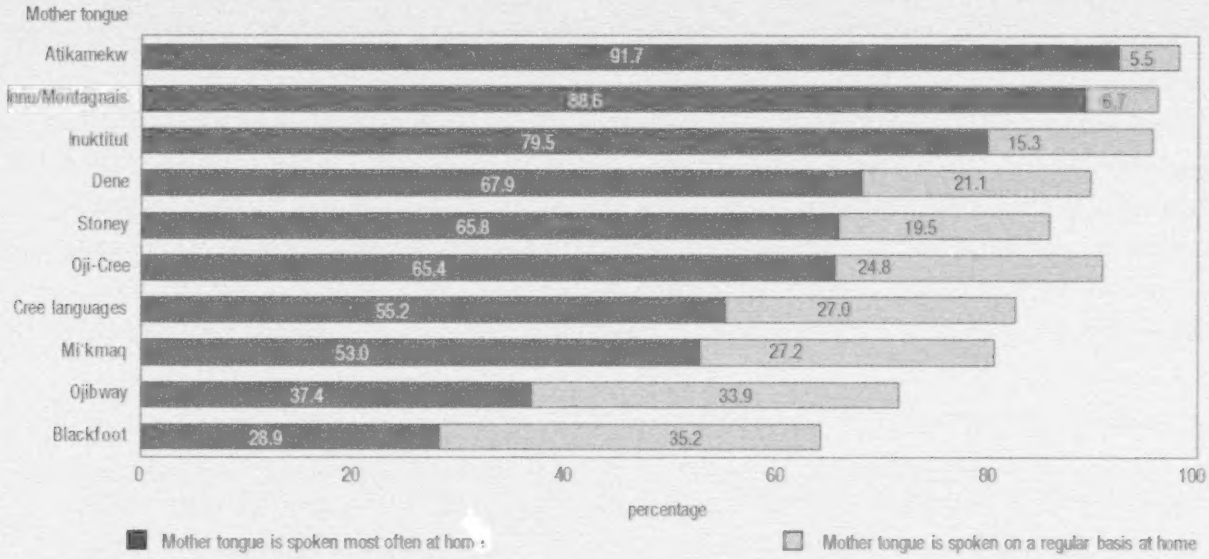
Majority of people who reported an Aboriginal mother tongue speak it at home

Among the population reporting an Aboriginal mother tongue, 82.2% also reported speaking it at home: 58.1% spoke it most often and 24.1% spoke it on a regular basis, in addition to the language they speak most often. These proportions differ among the ten most frequently reported Aboriginal mother tongues.

For example, of the roughly 6,000 people who reported Atikamekw as mother tongue, 97.2% spoke it at home (91.7% most often and 5.5% on a regular basis). Similarly, about 95% of the people whose mother tongues were Innu/Montagnais or Inuktitut, and about 90% of those whose mother tongues were Oji-Cree or Dene, spoke them most often or regularly at home (Chart 1).

Although some people with an Aboriginal language as their mother tongue did not report speaking it most often at home, many were still speaking it on a regular basis at home. For example, 28.9% of people whose mother tongue was Blackfoot reported speaking this language most often at home, while another 35.2% reported speaking it on a regular basis, in addition to the language they spoke most often.

Chart 1
Proportion of the population whose mother tongue is one of the ten most reported Aboriginal languages who speak their language most often or on a regular basis at home, Canada, 2011



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2011.

Among the 50 or so other Aboriginal languages, most of them were spoken at home by between 30% and 60% of the people who reported them as mother tongues. They were generally spoken on a regular basis in addition to the main home language (such as English or French); however, some exceptions are noteworthy. For example, 90.2% of the people reporting Naskapi and 54.8% of the people reporting Tlicho (Dogrib) as their mother tongue spoke it most often at home.

Use of Aboriginal languages at home differs by where people live

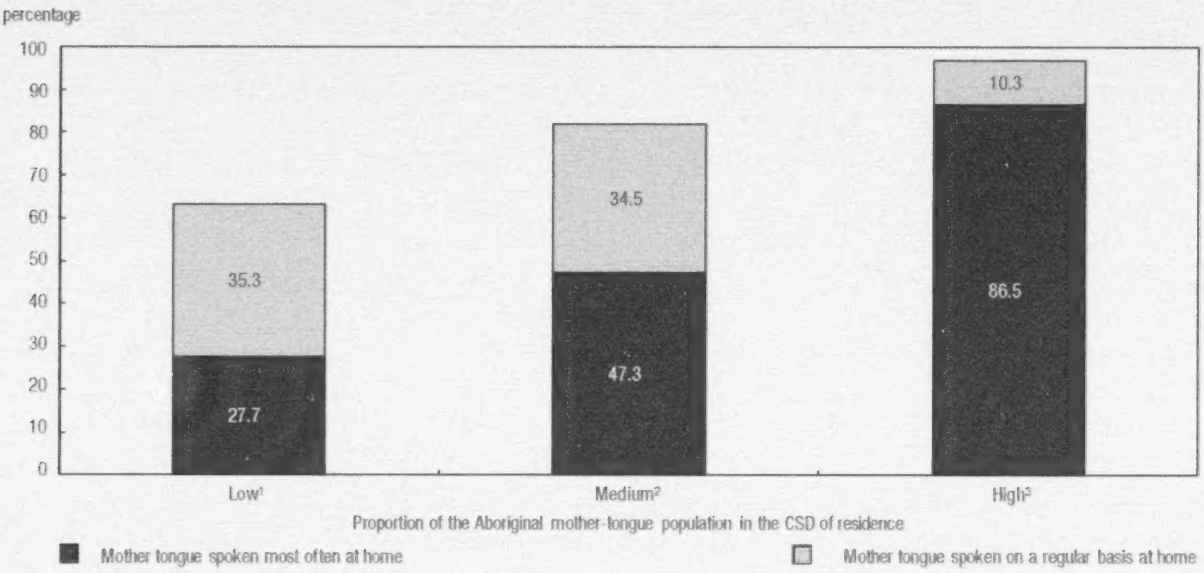
In 2011, the proportion of people with an Aboriginal mother tongue who spoke their language at home differed based on where they lived. Specifically, people were more likely to speak their Aboriginal mother tongue at home when living in a census subdivision (CSD)[5] with a high proportion of the population whose mother tongue was an Aboriginal language.

In CSDs with high proportions of people reporting an Aboriginal mother tongue, most people (96.8%) with an Aboriginal mother tongue spoke that language at home (86.5% most often and 10.3% on a regular basis) (Chart 2).

Conversely, people were less likely to speak their Aboriginal mother tongue at home in CSDs with low proportions of people reporting an Aboriginal mother tongue. In these CSDs, 63.0% of people with an Aboriginal mother tongue reported speaking their language at home (27.7% most often and 35.3% on a regular basis).

5. Census subdivision (CSD) corresponds to a municipality or an area deemed to be equivalent to a municipality. Indian reserves and Indian settlements are also included in the definition of a census subdivision.

Chart 2
Proportion of the population who speak their Aboriginal mother tongue most often or regularly at home, by the proportion of the Aboriginal mother-tongue population in the census subdivision (CSD) of residence, Canada, 2011



1. A 'low' proportion of people with an Aboriginal mother tongue includes proportions from 0% to 29%.
2. A 'medium' proportion of people with an Aboriginal mother tongue includes proportions from 30% to 69%.
3. A 'high' proportion of people with an Aboriginal mother tongue includes proportions from 70% to 100%.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2011.

Selected findings from the 2011 National Household Survey[6]

About one in six Aboriginal people can converse in an Aboriginal language

According to the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS), 240,815 Aboriginal people, or 17.2% of the population who reported an Aboriginal identity,[7] responded that they were able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language[8,9] (Table 2). This compares with 21.0%[10] according to the 2006 Census of Population. Between 2006 and 2011, the number of Aboriginal people who reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language declined by 2.0%, while the Aboriginal identity population increased by 20.1%.

6. This section is based on the document entitled *Aboriginal peoples and language*, which presents information on knowledge of Aboriginal languages, Aboriginal mother tongues and home languages, as well as language data for the Aboriginal population for the population in private households based on the data from the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS). The NHS language data are presented for a different universe and are therefore not directly comparable to the 2011 Census language data.
7. The term 'Aboriginal identity' refers to whether the person reported being an Aboriginal person, that is, First Nations (North American Indian), Métis or Inuk (Inuit) and/or being a Registered or Treaty Indian, (that is, registered under the *Indian Act* of Canada) and/or being a member of a First Nation or Indian band. Aboriginal peoples of Canada are defined in the *Constitution Act, 1982*, section 35 (2) as including the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada.
8. Some Indian reserves and settlements did not participate in the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) as enumeration was either not permitted, it was interrupted before completion, or because of natural events (e.g., forest fires). These reserves are referred to as 'incompletely enumerated reserves.' There were 36 reserves out of 863 inhabited reserves in the 2011 NHS that were incompletely enumerated. Data for these 36 Indian reserves and Indian settlements are not included in the 2011 NHS tabulations. As a result, some estimates in this document may be underestimated, especially for First Nations people.
9. Knowledge of languages refers to languages in which the respondent can conduct a conversation. The knowledge of languages data are based on the respondent's assessment of his or her ability to speak these languages. Estimates for knowledge of Aboriginal language in this document include single responses of an Aboriginal language as well as multiple responses of an Aboriginal language with English, French, different Aboriginal languages and/or non-official and non-Aboriginal languages.
10. Data in this document showing changes in percentages and proportions between the 2011 National Household Survey and the 2006 Census data have been adjusted to account for incompletely enumerated Indian reserves in 2006 and/or 2011. Moreover, the 2006 Census data have been adjusted to the same universe used for the 2011 NHS (population in private households).

Among the three Aboriginal groups[11] (First Nations people,[12] Métis and Inuit), the proportion reporting an ability to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language was the highest among Inuit. In 2011, 63.7% of Inuit reported being able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language, mostly Inuktitut. The proportion was 22.4% among First Nations people and 2.5% among Métis.

In addition to the ability to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language, the NHS collected information on mother tongue and home language providing additional insight into the linguistic characteristics of the Aboriginal population.

In 2011, 14.5% of the Aboriginal population reported an Aboriginal language as mother tongue. As well, 14.0% of Aboriginal people reported speaking an Aboriginal language at home: 8.5% spoke it most often while another 5.5% spoke it on a regular basis, in addition to the language they spoke most often.

Table 2
Proportion of population who reported an ability to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language and proportion who reported an Aboriginal mother tongue, for selected Aboriginal identity categories, Canada, 2011

Selected Aboriginal identity categories	Ability to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language	Aboriginal language as mother tongue
	Proportion (%) of population	
Total Aboriginal identity population	17.2	14.5
First Nations single identity	22.4	18.7
Métis single identity	2.5	1.8
Inuit single identity	63.7	58.7

Source: Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.

Some Aboriginal people acquiring an Aboriginal language as a second language

More Aboriginal people reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language than reported an Aboriginal mother tongue. In 2011, 240,815 Aboriginal people reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language, while 202,495 Aboriginal people reported an Aboriginal mother tongue. This implies that a number of Aboriginal people have acquired an Aboriginal language as a second language.

Among the 240,815 Aboriginal people who reported being able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language, 188,540 or 78.3% reported that same language as their mother tongue.

The other 52,275, or 21.7%, reported a different language, such as English or French, as mother tongue, which suggests these individuals have acquired an Aboriginal language as a second language. The proportion varied from 35.3% for the Métis, 23.1% for First Nations people to 10.2% for Inuit (Table 3).

According to the 2011 NHS, 4,305 non-Aboriginal people reported knowing an Aboriginal language. Most of them (80.5%) did not report it as their mother tongue and thus have acquired it as a second language.

11. Although single and multiple responses to the Aboriginal identity question are possible, the data for each of the three Aboriginal groups in this document are based on the population reporting a single identity of 'First Nations', 'Métis' or 'Inuit.'

12. Respondents self-identified as 'First Nations (North American Indian)' on the NHS questionnaire; however, the term 'First Nations people' is used throughout this document.

Table 3
Population who reported an ability to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language that is not their mother tongue, for selected Aboriginal identity categories, Canada, 2011

Selected Aboriginal identity categories	Persons who could conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language that is not their mother tongue	
	number[1]	%
Total Aboriginal identity population	52,275	21.7
First Nations single identity	44,140	23.1
Métis single identity	3,975	35.3
Inuit single identity	3,845	10.2
Non-Aboriginal identity population	3,465	80.5

1. The estimates for the three Aboriginal groups do not add to the total Aboriginal identity population because only selected Aboriginal identity categories are shown.
Source: Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.

Less than one in ten of the Aboriginal people who reported an Aboriginal mother tongue have lost their ability to converse in that language

Among the 202,495 Aboriginal people who reported an Aboriginal language as mother tongue, 13,955 or 6.9% could no longer conduct a conversation in this language, despite the fact that they still understand it[13] (Table 4).

The proportion varied from 12.0% for the Métis, 7.6% for First Nations people, to 2.5% for Inuit. Moreover, non-Aboriginal people who reported an Aboriginal mother tongue were more likely to lose their ability to conduct a conversation in their mother tongue, with 33.1% who could not conduct a conversation in this language any longer.

Table 4
Population who reported an Aboriginal mother tongue but who could not conduct a conversation in that language, for selected Aboriginal identity categories, Canada, 2011

Selected Aboriginal identity categories	Persons who could not conduct a conversation in their Aboriginal mother tongue	
	number[1]	%
Total Aboriginal identity population	13,955	6.9
First Nations single identity	12,010	7.6
Métis single identity	995	12.0
Inuit single identity	875	2.5
Non-Aboriginal identity population	415	33.1

1. The estimates for the three Aboriginal groups do not add to the total Aboriginal identity population because only selected Aboriginal identity categories are shown.
Source: Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.

13. The NHS does not measure the number of persons who no longer understand the language they first learned at home in childhood.

About one in five First Nations people can converse in an Aboriginal language

In 2011, 191,010 First Nations people reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language, representing 22.4% of the First Nations population. This proportion was lower by 5.6 percentage points[14] than what was reported on the 2006 Census of Population. Between 2006 and 2011, the number of First Nations people who reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language declined by 1.8%, while the total number of First Nations people increased by 22.9%.

Among the more than 60 Aboriginal languages in which First Nations people reported being able to conduct a conversation, the Cree languages were the most frequently reported. About 87,600 First Nations people reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in one of these Cree languages, followed by 23,880 who reported Ojibway, 11,135 who reported Innu/Montagnais, 10,725 who reported Dene and 10,120 who reported they could converse in Oji-Cree. These five Aboriginal languages accounted for 75.1% of the First Nations people who reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language.

First Nations people who reported having registered Indian status[15] were more likely to be able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language than those who were not Registered Indians. In 2011, 29.2% of the 637,660 First Nations people with registered Indian status were able to do so, compared with 2.2% of the 213,900 First Nations people who were not Registered Indians (Table 5).

In addition, 44.7% of First Nations people with registered Indian status living on reserve[16] reported being able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language, more than three times the proportion of 14.1% among First Nations people with registered Indian status living off reserve.

Table 5
Population who reported an ability to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language for selected First Nations population groups, Canada, 2011

	Persons reporting an ability to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language	
Selected First Nations population groups	number	%
Total First Nations people	191,010	22.4
Registered or Treaty Indian	186,210	29.2
Living on reserve	140,660	44.7
Living off reserve	45,545	14.1
Not a Registered or Treaty Indian	4,795	2.2

Source: Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.

Less than 3% of Métis can conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language

In 2011, 11,255 Métis, or 2.5% of the Métis population, reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language, compared with 3.5% according to the 2006 Census of Population. Between 2006 and 2011, the number of Métis who reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language declined by 17.9%, while the Métis population increased by 16.3%.

14. After adjusting the data for both the 2011 NHS and the 2006 Census of Population to account for incompletely enumerated Indian reserves in 2006 and/or 2011, as well as adjusting the 2006 Census data to the same universe used for the 2011 NHS (population in private households), the proportion of First Nations people who reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language was 22.5% according to the 2011 NHS and 28.1% according to the 2006 Census of Population.

15. Registered Indians are persons who are registered under the *Indian Act* of Canada. Treaty Indians are persons who belong to a First Nation or Indian band that signed a treaty with the Crown. Registered or Treaty Indians are sometimes also called Status Indians. For the purpose of this document, the term 'Registered Indian' will be used for people who reported being a Status, Registered or Treaty Indian on the NHS.

16. 'On reserve' includes six types of census subdivisions (CSDs) legally affiliated with First Nations or Indian bands, i.e., Indian reserve (IRI), Indian settlement (S-É) (except for the five Yukon settlements of Champagne Landing 10, Klukshu, Two and One-Half Mile Village, Two Mile Village and Kloo Lake), Indian government district (IGD), terres réservées aux Cris (TC), terres réservées aux Naskapis (TK) and Nisga'a land (NL), as well as the northern village of Sandy Bay in Saskatchewan.

The NHS recorded more than 20 Aboriginal languages in which Métis reported being able to conduct a conversation. The Aboriginal languages spoken by the largest number of Métis were the Cree languages, reported by 7,110 persons. They were followed by 2,080 who reported Dene, 940 who reported Michif and 805 who reported being able to converse in Ojibway. These four Aboriginal languages accounted for 97.2% of the Métis population that reported speaking an Aboriginal language well enough to carry on a conversation.

Nearly two in three Inuit can conduct a conversation in an Inuit language

In 2011, 37,615 Inuit, or 63.3% of the Inuit population, reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in an Inuit language. In the 2006 Census of Population, that proportion was 68.8%. Between 2006 and 2011, the number of Inuit who reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in an Inuit language increased by 8.6%, a slower pace compared with the growth of 18.1% for the Inuit population.

The Inuit language spoken by the largest number of Inuit was Inuktitut. About 36,050 Inuit reported being able to conduct a conversation in Inuktitut. They were followed by 675 who reported being able to speak Inuinnaqtun, 625 who reported Inuvialuktun and 285 who reported being able to converse in another Inuit language.

Inuktitut accounted for 95.8% of the Inuit population who reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in an Inuit language. Relatively low numbers (less than 400) of Inuit spoke other Aboriginal languages, such as Cree (150) and Innu/Montagnais (95).

The proportion of Inuit who reported being able to conduct a conversation in an Inuit language differed within Inuit Nunangat[17] (Table 6). Virtually all Inuit (99.1%) living in Nunavik could converse in an Inuit language. In Nunavut, nearly nine in ten Inuit could speak an Inuit language well enough to hold a conversation in that language.

Fewer Inuit living in Nunatsiavut (24.9%) and in the Inuvialuit region of the Northwest Territories (20.1%) reported knowing an Inuit language. Outside Inuit Nunangat,[18] one in ten Inuit reported speaking an Inuit language well enough to conduct a conversation.

Table 6
Inuit population who reported an ability to conduct a conversation in an Inuit language by area of residence – Inuit Nunangat, Canada, 2011

	Inuit reporting an ability to conduct a conversation in an Inuit language	
Area of residence – Inuit Nunangat	number	%
Total Inuit population	37,615	63.3
Inuit Nunangat	35,995	82.8
Nunatsiavut	580	24.9
Nunavik	10,660	99.1
Nunavut	24,090	89.0
Inuvialuit region	665	20.1
Outside Inuit Nunangat[1]	1,625	10.2

1. Estimates and trends from other data sources suggest that the Inuit population living outside of Inuit Nunangat is overestimated at the national level.

Source: Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.

17. Inuit Nunangat is the homeland of Inuit of Canada. It includes the communities located in the four Inuit regions: Nunatsiavut (Northern coastal Labrador), Nunavik (Northern Quebec), the territory of Nunavut and the Inuvialuit region of the Northwest Territories. These regions collectively encompass the area traditionally occupied by Inuit in Canada.

18. Estimates and trends from other data sources suggest that the Inuit population living outside of Inuit Nunangat is overestimated at the national level.

Most recent data sources on Aboriginal languages at Statistics Canada

2011 Census of Population and 2011 National Household Survey

The 2011 Census of Population provides data on Aboriginal languages as mother tongue and home language for the total population. For the first time in 2011, three language questions (knowledge of official languages, home language and mother tongue) were included on the census questionnaire that was administered to 100% of the population. Language data and analysis published for all censuses since 1996 have been based almost exclusively on responses from the long-form census questionnaire administered to 20% of the population.

In 2011, Statistics Canada conducted the National Household Survey (NHS) for the first time. This voluntary, self-administered survey was introduced as a replacement for the long census questionnaire. Roughly 4.5 million households across Canada were selected for the NHS, representing about one-third of all households. The NHS provides data on Aboriginal languages as mother tongue, home language and language of work, as well as data about knowledge of Aboriginal languages for the population in private households. Language data for the Aboriginal population are available only from the NHS.

2012 Aboriginal Peoples Survey

The data from the 2012 Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS) were released in November 2013, at which time the analysis for this article was already completed. The 2012 APS collected the following information on language: ability to speak and to understand an Aboriginal language by ability rating (only a few words, with effort, relatively well or very well), importance of speaking and understanding an Aboriginal language, frequency of exposure to an Aboriginal language at home and outside the home and language(s) first learned at home in childhood. The target population includes all people living in Canada who were aged 6 and over as of February 1, 2012, and who identified themselves as an Aboriginal person in the 2011 NHS. Excluded from this population are people living on a reserve in the provinces and in selected First Nations communities in the territories.

Conclusion

This paper has provided data on some of the factors related to language vitality for a number of Aboriginal languages in Canada, such as the size of the mother tongue population, language retention at home, place of residence and proportion of speakers within the population of each Aboriginal group.

The 2011 Census and the 2011 NHS can also provide data on other language vitality factors such as intergenerational language transmission, the age of the speakers and language of work. Future research could look at these other factors as well as do a more in-depth analysis of the factors illustrated in this paper.

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